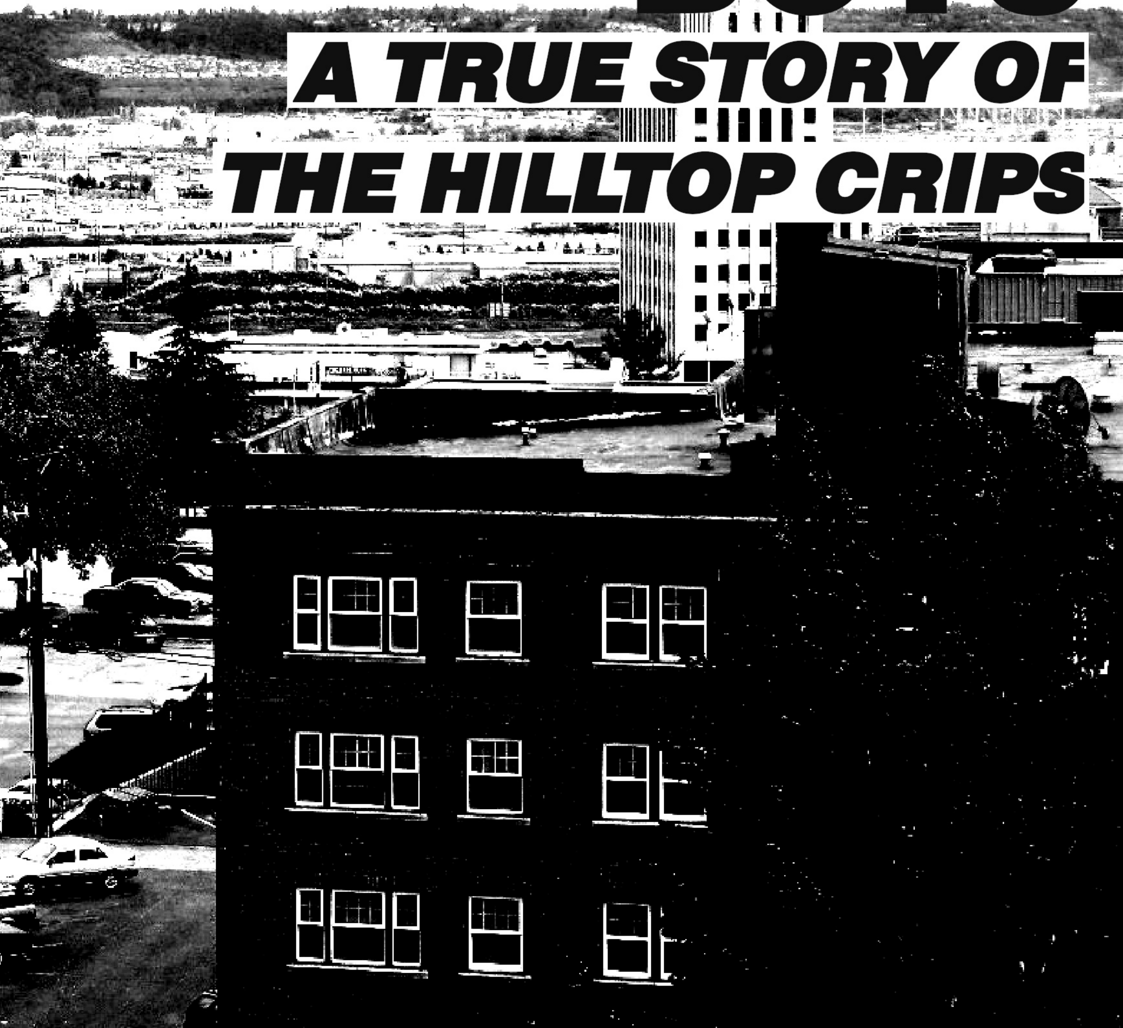
THE HILLTOP BOYS

A TRUE STORY OF THE HILLTOP CRIPS



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THIS ARTICLE IS BASED ON INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED IN THE HILLTOP

PEOPLE'S PARK

It was gray for a week, but on the day of the barbecue the sun had come out and there were no clouds in the sky. Dozens of people all relaxed at People's Park in the Hilltop neighborhood of Tacoma. Chicken and ribs cooked on the grills while people sat in the shade or the sun, talking to each other, smoking cigarettes, watching their children. The barbecue was meant to bring people in the Hilltop community together at a time when many of its young men were being sentenced to prison. At the barbecue were mothers and sisters and friends of the men in jail. Despite the sentences being handed down by the judges, the mood at the barbecue was positive and hopeful.

Before the food was served, I sat down at a bench with a woman named Elaine White. She told me that her son Michael White, 33 at the time of his arrest, was rounded up by the Tacoma Police Department in February along with other supposed Crip members. They came into Elaine's house with a search warrant but he wasn't there. They later found him in another house. He is being charged with criminal conspiracy, first-degree burglary, drive-by shooting, second-degree assault and riot. If he is convicted for any of these offensives, it will be his third strike. All of the charges stem from an incident that took place at a Denny's restaurant in December of 2008.

Denny's is open twenty four hours. At night the parking lot is filled with cars and music and smoke. On this night, different groups of friends, different crews, began to yell at each other. A fight broke out, fueled by blind anger and alcohol. When the fight ended, several people were injured, including a security guard, gunshots were fired into the restaurant parking lot, and people fl ed in different directions.

"He went out by himself that night," his mother Elaine told me. "Everyone knew each other. He just went out with his friends." Michael's bail was set at one mil-lion dollars. While his mother and I sat talking, Michael was trapped inside the Pierce County Jail just seven blocks down the hill. Michael was a Crip at 14. He may or may not have gone to his first year of high school at Wilson. "When kids make up their mind, they make their own choices," Elaine said, describing how her son was determined to live the life he chose for himself. For three years he lived and ran with his friends until, at the age of 17, he was arrested for drugs.

Walla Walla was his new home for the next five years. According to Elaine, when Michael was released he got "sucked back in" to life as a Crip. Two years later he was sent back inside for vehicular homicide. In total, he spent eleven years of his life inside a prison in Walla Walla.

When he was thirty and out of prison, Michael tried to live what his mother called a normal life. He got his driver's license and started working at Albert Lee Furniture where he drove appliances to consumer's houses and installed them. He lived in a house with his girlfriend and three daughters.

Besides his children and his family, Michael also had his friends when he was released. These were the people he had grown up with, who he had known since he was a teenager. And then one night, at liberty and free, Michael decided to go out with those friends. It is impossible to give up ones friends, especially aft er being in jail for a third of your life. Michael refused to give up his friends.

His mother Elaine does not understand why the authorities are trying to portray the 36 arrested men as being part of a tight-nit,

structured conspiracy. “How are they organized?” she asked me. “How? Th e cops think the older ones are giving orders. How is this organized crime? Where’s the money? If they’re so organized then where’s the money?”

According to her, the younger generations below her son are growing more ignorant and eager to shoot. The Crips are not organized, they all simply grew up together and Elaine has known them since they were children. “They call me mom,” she says. “I cook and they all come over.”

“These guys are just friends, then?” I ask.

“We’ve all known each other forever. Yeah. They were all friends.”

“Is there anyone who is specifically going after all these guys?” I ask.

“Ringer,” she replied. “Detective Ringer. He’s going to retire soon.”

Elaine and I stop talking. She helps with the barbecue, has a cigarette with her friends, and talks with people she has known forever. Kids from the neighborhood stand in line to get food once it is ready. Everyone eats as much as they want. The stated purpose of this barbecue in People’s Park was to simply be together.

CHRIS SIMMS AND JOHN RINGER

With the help of various snitches who were manipulated into cooperating, the authorities constructed a cabalistic conspiracy between everyone they rounded up. The prosecution portrayed a cohesive, deliberate structure through which crimes were decided on and executed. The war machine they portrayed in court and through the media was disciplined and rigid. In reality, the young men they targeted were disorganized and erratic, just like everyone

else in Tacoma. There was no cohesion within the organization because there was no organization to begin with. The Tacoma Police Department, itself a vast conspiracy, was very eager to portray these young man as conspirators. Those who conspire always believe that others are conspiring against them.

John Ringer was one of the lead detectives conspiring against this circle of friends. He summed it up best when he said, "We were able to establish the conspiracy. When they join the group, they join the conspiracy." Ringer, 48, a soon to retire detective, went aft er the targeted young men with a degree of glee and psychosis that is unusual even in a police officer. For 20 years he has jailed and persecuted people he identified as being a Crip. At one point, he even kept a scrapbook filled with pictures of Crips he had known and targeted. With this latest operation, Ringer has come unhinged, hoping to lord this new victory over his victims.

When a young man named Christopher Simms was in court, accused of being a Crip, Ringer started pointing at his sister Ciyanna, telling the guards to watch her, implying that she was dangerous. Ringer did this just before Simms was found guilty of criminal conspiracy, attempted first-degree murder and first-degree unlawful possession of a firearm. When the judge said the word guilty, Ciyanna told her brother everything would be okay. And then his eyes rolled up into his head and he passed out.

Th e courtroom erupted at that moment. Ciyanna started to yell at Ringer, telling him to stop pointing at her. "Why the fuck are there all these police?" she yelled, waving at the police who were surrounding her. At one point, she yelled, "I can't breath!" Her brother was taken away, Ciyanna left the court-room, and John Ringer was congratulated for the conviction.

John Ringer was determined to crush the Crips, a gang once

prominent in the Hilltop neighborhood. Th e gang formed in Los Angeles and came to the Hilltop in the 1980's, with transplants from California operating on the streets. Soon the gang blossomed, its efforts fueled and funded by the sale of crack cocaine. Crips were overt in flying their colors and fl ashing their signs, proud to belong to their gang. Th roughout the 80's and 90's, aft er dozens of crackdowns, the gang began to change. Its founders and old-timers were either locked up or dead, and the younger generations adapted to a changing landscape. Today, in 2010, it is no longer like the old days.

Th ere is no longer the clear distinction between gang member and citizen, criminal and civilian. 20 years ago, when John Ringer patrolled the streets, he could pick out gang members by sight. And now that he can't, he and his co-conspirators have grown desperate and are targeting young men and their families in order to further cleanse a neighborhood that was once completely out of their control. Just like John Ringer, the TPD is psychotically flexing its muscle to destroy the last traces of something that doesn't exist.

MEETING WITH THE CHIEF

Everyone waited in a conference room in the basement of Shiloh Baptist Church. Four Tacoma Police officers soon walked in, appearing slightly nervous. They greeted everyone, chatted about basketball, and then bowed their heads before god in prayer with everyone assembled. Among them was Don Ramsdell, the chief of the Tacoma Police Department. Th e four police officers volunteered to meet with this particular community group in order to improve their relations with the public. Th e community group, composed of the friends and mothers of the young men in jail, agreed to meet with the police in order to get answers. Th e police wanted good PR, the group wanted resolution.

When chief Ramsdell was told that his police officers had violated the law, he didn't fl inch. When he was asked how to file a complaint against the Tacoma Police Department, Ramsdell spent five minutes explaining in minute detail the bureaucratic labyrinth of filing a formal complaint. He never acknowledged that his officers had violated the law, sidestepped the accusation, and prattled on like a robot, emotionless and clear. Th e person who asked the question silenced themselves aft er this. It was under the shadow of authority that the meeting began.

Th e police spoke with benevolence, hiding behind their expertise whenever someone posed a difficult question. When asked how they dealt with habitual liars, the police responded by narrating their procedures when dealing with informants. They never responded emotionally. Chief Ramsdell was asked why detectives like John Ringer were allowed to micro-manage the cases from within the courtroom. "I don't think it's very productive to answer questions about this," he said in response. "It doesn't get us anywhere." When he was pressed further, all that Ramsdell could bring himself to say was, "That's our system. I know it's frustrating. I don't know..." Later on, he referred to the operation that robbed some of the women in the room of their loved ones as "the big takedown."

And then Lieutenant Sanford piped up. He told the people in the room that more was coming. Th e police know how to take out gangs quickly and effectively. Th ere would be more operations targeting the gangs. "You have to go aft er the group, dismantle the network," he said. Someone asked why it was just the Hilltop that was targeted. Ramsdell responded that the Hilltop community wasn't targeted, only the Crips were. Th e police only went aft er the bad guys.

It was clear to some in the room that the latest operation against the young men was not a benevolent act to protect the Hilltop community. It was a final push to get rid of anyone who lived illegally, anyone who would not fit in with a Hilltop covered in condominiums. In response to the police and their feigned benevolence, a woman in the room said, “Hilltop was targeted for gentrification. It’s not fair for you all to sit there and pretend that’s not what happened.” Th e police had no response to this statement. All of them remained silent.

No one in the room had any illusions about what had happened to the Hill-top over the years. It has been slowly blasted apart and reconfigured, making way for new condominiums and apartments. Th e violence has subsided, but now the streets are empty at night and the police will detain anyone who dares to walk through an alley, sit on a ledge, or wander without a purpose. In order to pacify the streets, the police had to destroy all street life, all illegal life, all rebellious life.

It is no coincidence that the police substation on Hilltop is across the street from the People’s Community Center where they can keep a close eye on everything. Th e Tacoma Police Department wants to integrate everyone into its plans for the neighborhood. It wants to incorporate everyone, deputize everyone, and render everyone into good citizens. Ramsdell explained his department’s plans for the Hilltop neighborhood very simply when he said, “We need to get to these kids when they’re young. We need to go these kids right now. How do we get into your community?”

CIYANNA AND CHRISTOPHER

Ciyanna Fowler watched her brother Christopher Simms pass out in court aft er he was found guilty. Her entire family had been

demonized by Detective John Ringer. For years he had fought people he considered enemies, and in his old age he was pointing them out in court, determined to crush everyone surrounding his victims. When Christopher was taken out of the court room and back to his cell, Ringer stared malevolently at Ciyanna as she screamed:

"I CAN'T BREATHE!"

Ciyanna is being kicked out of her apartment. Be-cause of the recent spotlight cast on her family, her landlord does not want to rent to anyone related to the gangs and the apartment was recently under video surveillance. Her daughter Deja has seen her uncle Chris on the television screen and heard the newscasters calling him dangerous.

Christopher was always there for his sister and her daughter. Ciyanna said that "my kids are Chris's kids." She doesn't want Deja to grow up without her uncle. Despite what is happening to Chris, Ciyanna said her family is "staying as strong as they can."

She has known people who called them-selves Crips her whole life. "At one point, the Crips ran Hilltop," she said. "In the last ten years things changed. Everyone's dead, in jail. Th e young generation only knows the history, the past, they hear about the old days. A lot of them want to be like the OG's. They're little boys who want to prove something."

Th e originals are all in their thirties. They lived through a time when the neighborhood was at war with itself. In that time period, Ciyanna grew up with some Crips protecting her.

"I had fun with them," she said. "All the guys protected me. They told me to stay away from the boys, taught me all their tricks. They helped me with anything, watched over me when I was a girl.

They're just people, part of my family. We've all know each other forever. If they're in for conspiracy, we all should be in jail for knowing them. I've fed half of them."

Despite being protected, there was a night in 2001 when several other Crips broke into Ciyanna's house and kept her family hostage at gunpoint while they searched for guns or drugs. They didn't find anything , and soon aft er this Chris and Ciyanna's mother Monica Fowler moved her family of thirteen women and one boy to Georgia, hoping to get out of Tacoma and keep her children out of gang life. Th e family stayed there until 2007. Gentrifi cation of the Hilltop neighborhood intensified when they left in 2001. By the time they re-turned, the neighborhood was less black and something had changed.

Chris left Tacoma when he was thirteen and returned with his family when he was 19. Four months aft er returning, he was arrested for a picking a friend and spent a year and a half in jail for being an accomplice. Two months aft er being released for that crime he was picked up again, only this time he was now supposedly part of the conspiracy. His friend Anthony Smith had been coerced into collaborating with the police and implicated Christopher in a shooting where the authorities are saying he and three others shot a young man who is now paralyzed from the waist down. Christopher is being charged with criminal conspiracy, attempted first-degree murder, and first-degree unlawful possession of a firearm. He has already been found guilty.

"Chris is a silly guy," Ciyanna said. "He'll always make you smile. He hadn't even begun to live life. And you know...he can't help who he knows. I know a lot of people, but not everyone knows each other. People don't all even like each other."

When asked how she felt about how her brother and friends

were being portrayed, she replied that "aft er reading the responses in newspapers and on their wesbites, I couldn't believe people are so fucked up and racist." Th e comments section of the Th e News Tribune, for example, is filled with applause for the police and there are many comments that encourage the lynching of those arrested.

Now, aft er the trial and the media spectacle, Ciyanna doesn't like leaving the house. Her brother has been implicated in being part of a large criminal conspiracy and because of this, Ciyanna has been implicated as well. "I feel uncomfortable," she said. "It feels like everyone is staring at me, has some-thing to say to me but won't say it. Everyone thinks Chris is a murderer."

During an interview with KOMO 4 News about the court cases, Monica Fowler, the mother of Chris and Ciyanna, said that "they're trying them as a whole, as if they had a leader to the pack, like they've all come together to commit crimes, like they all sat down and plotted this. Th at didn't happen."

STEPHEN LOVELACE

"They've come into my home three times in the last year," Chastity Bryant told a KOMO 4 reporter. "They were searching for guns and drugs, and every time they haven't found anything." She said these last words directly to the camera, tears starting to form in her eyes. Her friend Steven Lovelace is also being implicated with Christopher Simms in the shooting that left a young man paralyzed.

In her house, Chastity Bryant told me about Stephen Lovelace, who she had known since elementary school. Everyone called him Spud, a nickname given to him by his mother. When he was 9 years old, Stephen's mother died. Th e only people he had as guardians were the older generation of Crips.

"HE HAD NO DIRECTION," CHASTITY SAID. "ALL HE HAD WAS THE STREETS. YOU HAVE TO SEE BETTER TO KNOW BETTER."

When he was 17 he was arrested for domestic violence and was put in jail until he was 21. While incarcerated, Stephen was able to pass his GED exam and earn a high school equivalency. Aft er getting out he got his driver's license, started working through STG International and also did landscaping work. In March of 2009, he was arrested for allegedly shooting a man at McCabe's Bar and Grill who is still in a coma. Th e charges of attempted murder were later dismissed without prejudice, meaning the charges could be brought up in the future.

On February 8th, 2010, Stephen was arrested again. Th e old charges were brought up along with new charges of criminal conspiracy, first-degree burglary, drive-by shooting, second-degree assault, riot, another charge of at-tempted first-degree murder, and two counts of first-degree unlawful possession of a firearm. He was the first person to be arrested in the sweep that was described by the authorities as "one hell of a hammer." Stephen was called into to his probation office and when he arrived they arrested him. Chastity began to cry when they related this last detail to me. "If they really thought Spud had shot someone, if they knew he had shot someone, they wouldn't have let him walk around. They don't have any evidence.

Chastity knows Stephen is not responsible for the shooting at McCabe's Bar and Grill. The brawl that led to the shooting apparently started when one person stepped on another person's shoe. In the video of the incident, Stephen can be seen leaving the area of the brawl with two girls. But despite the lack of evidence against him, Chastity said Stephen will probably take a deal. "No

one is fighting it," she said. "Everyone will take a deal. Its security, knowing you'll only be in jail twelve months, even if you're innocent." When I asked why the authorities are going after people who are innocent, she told me they wanted "easy convictions."

According to Chastity, the people who began to collaborate with the police and helped them build a case are also the ones who were the most reckless and brazen. "They were the ones pistol whipping people and robbing them," she said. Curtis Hudson, one of the informants, pled guilty to seventeen charges alone. The police put pressure on these people in order to get them to co-create a fictitious criminal conspiracy. They exploited the fact that the Crips are not a cohesive organization in order to make them appear as one. "Different Crips, different cliques, they don't even like each other," she said. "They're all Crips, but they're not together."

The police and the media are trying to invoke the turbulent history of the Hilltop Crips in order to strengthen their case against the defendants, but Hilltop has dramatically changed, the frame no longer fits the picture. "Everything is done," Chastity said. "It's not going down anymore. It's totally boring. It's less violent. I don't have to worry so much about my daughter, but it's boring. Spud didn't even recognize Hilltop when he got out.

Everything changed." There were bunches of people who would hang out together on street corners and entire apartment complexes that teemed with illegality, partying , and excitement. But the condos started coming and white kids in tight jeans, who Chastity said would have been jumped before, now "think they own Hill-top." Everyone in the neighborhood is being pushed to the south end of the hill where there is low-income housing waiting to contain the community. "They're trying to push everyone into those fancy looking Section 8 houses just so they can all be crammed together in one place, out of sight. They want everything to look nice."

There once used to be dances at the People's Community Center on Martin Luther King Jr. Way. During many of those dances there would be a fight. Sometimes there would be a shooting. The dances stopped when the police substation was built across the street from the Community Center. The sub-station is surrounded with cameras. There is no more dancing.

“WHY WERE SOME OF THESE GUYS DOING WHAT THEY WERE DOING ?” I ASK CHASTITY.

“SOME OF THEM...SOME OF THEM WERE PAYING THEIR MOMMA’S MORTGAGE, FEEDING THEIR KIDS.”

“IS THERE ANY WAY TO STOP WHAT THE CITY AND THE POLICE ARE DOING TO THE HILLTOP?” I ASK.

CHASTITY HESITATES FOR A MOMENT, UNSURE OF WHAT TO SAY.

POSTSCRIPT

One Morning, without having done anything truly wrong, he was arrested.
-Franz Kafka, The Trial

I wrote the article "The Hilltop Boys" in the summer of 2010. Since then, most of the thirty-six young men who were arrested in the Crips conspiracy case have been sent to prison. Some of them will be inside for thirty years. Others, the ones who betrayed their friends, will be inside for only a few years.

The police threw a group of friends in cages, waited for some of them to talk, and then used the conspiracy case to systematically incarcerate them. Friendship is a powerful force that makes people stronger, bolder, and secure. Friendship is informal, diffuse, and chaotic. And it is friendship that the police feared the most in some of these young men. By making them betray each other, the police were able to finally lock them up.

In "The Hilltop Boys," I was only able to tell the stories of three of the thirty-six who were arrested. Now, writing this, I am only going to tell you the story of two. If I'd had the re-sources, time, or ability, I would have done more. As it is, I am only able to tell you these two stories. I stayed in contact with some of the loved ones of Michael White and Steven Lovelace and was able to keep updated on their cases. What follows is a recounting of what has happened since the summer. There is nothing unique about what is described in these pages. It is simply what happens every day in the County-City building.

MICHAEL WHITE

And the purpose of this extensive organization, gentle-men? It consists of arresting

innocent people and introducing senseless proceedings against them, which for the most part, as in my case, go nowhere. Given the senselessness of the whole affair, how could the bureaucracy avoid becoming entirely corrupt?

-Franz Kafka, The Trial

When I heard the news of the offer, I couldn't speak. More importantly, I didn't want to speak. They were offering Michael White nine years instead of the initial life sentence. On the one hand, I was happy that he wouldn't be gone forever. And clearly, if the prosecutors were offering nine years, it meant they didn't have a lot of evidence against him. On the other hand, I wasn't the person who would be gambling my life away if I tried to fight for my total freedom. When asked what I thought Michael should do, I lowered my head and waited for something that would never come.

Michael had been locked up since February of 2010, knowing he faced a life sentence. He maintained his innocence as he was dragged through endless court appearances, cuffed, shackled, and in his prison out-fit. There were people standing in front of him in court, accusing him of crimes, attacking his character, and trying their hardest to put him away for life. After every court appearance he would be led back into his cell at the Pierce County Jail. He would wait there, locked up at the foot of the Hilltop, until the guards took him back to the courtroom. His life was regulated and controlled by the machine that had captured him. Occasionally, people on the outside would make noise for people in the prison to hear, banging on the gates, blasting music, and screaming through a megaphone. Perhaps he heard the noise.

His daughters and mother would visit him. Sometimes he would receive mail. The court appearances continued. One by one, the other thirty-six with whom he had been arrested were sentenced and sent off to prison. The days wore on, repetitive and empty. Various figures in the Hilltop community attempted to intervene on

Michael's behalf. His law-yer ran through the legal maze with him, maitaining that his client was innocent and that the state did not have any evidence.

Michael had been separated from the thirty-six into a group of four, consisting of him-self, Steven Lovelace, Bryant Morgan, and Andre Parker. Each of their bail amounts were one million dollars. Morgan and Parker had already been sentenced to twenty-nine and thirty-one years respectively. Michael and Steven had not yet been found guilty for any crime. While in court, the four of them would sit in chains, unable to speak back to the people accusing them of crimes.

And then, once the defense had held firm for long enough, the state offered Michael nine years in exchange for a guilty plea. In other words, the state knew it didn't have any evidence but still wanted a conviction. Convictions look good for the media. A conviction, even if the person is innocent, makes the police appear strong, in-fallible, and unbeatable. It also helps the county prosecutor, Mark Lindquist, build a resume for any future political career. Michael White, faced with life in prison, had become a pawn in the game board of powerful white people. Despite knowing he could beat it, despite the fact that the prosecution was merely out for blood, Michael gave up nine years of his life away from his daughters, friends, and family. The only reason he did this was because the all-powerful judicial system had the power to hold him in a cage for the rest of his life.

I did not know how to feel, sitting in court, while Michael accepted the plea deal. Some people wanted to cheer, something I couldn't do. People were happy they would see him free again, even if it was nine years away. In court that day, I saw the normality of horror. "It wasn't a life sentence." "It's not as bad as it could have been." "At least he'll only be forty when he gets out." I looked up at

the sheriffs surrounding us in the courtroom, all with guns, all gazing at us with suspicion as we filed out into the hall-way. In the other courtrooms, other people were being sentenced. As I left the court-house, I watched people walk inside with defeated, tired, and weary faces. This was normal. This was peace. This was order.

STEVEN LOVELACE

Logic may indeed be unshakable, but it cannot withstand a man who is determined to live.

-Franz Kafka, The Trial

We waited as the judge was silent. The defense had argued that Steven's bail should be reduced from one million dollars to one hundred and fifty thousand. No one knew what was going to happen. I didn't think he would budge. And then he agreed. Later that day, Steven was free.

Steven immediately went to his loved ones, free for the first time since February of 2010. He had been charged with attempted murder in 2009, had the charges dismissed, spent several months free, and then was charged again for the same crime in 2010, only now he was part of a conspiracy. For the second time, Steven was released after his friends posted a non-refundable, fifteen thousand dollar bond. He spent the next few days at liberty, the only one of the thirty-six to have his bail reduced.

One morning I got a call from someone crying, telling me that Steven had been arrested again. In court that day, behind a glass barrier, Steven sat before a judge. The prosecutor told the judge that a shell casing test had magically come in, linking Steven to a separate crime. He also told the defense lawyer that if Steven posted bail again, he would be arrested again. There was no way they were going to let him be free, even for a moment. The judge listened,

nodded, and gave Steven an additional million dollar bail without a moment of hesitation. Steven was led out of the court in chains and taken back to a cage.

His loved ones could not get back the fifteen thousand dollars they spent on his bond. Everyone supporting Steven felt crushed by this new blow. That money was all that could be raised, and even if the second million dollar bail was reduced, no one would risk losing another fifteen thousand just to see him arrested again. And so people waited for the trial to begin, knowing their only hope now rested in the hands of the defense lawyer, the judge, and the jury.

When the trial began, the prosecuting attorney spoke to the jury about a grand conspiracy to murder a person at McCabe's. While he spoke, Detective Ringer and a posse of his goons sat in the court to intimidate his supporters and remind the prosecuting attorney who he was working for. Detective Ringer, along with County Prosecutor Mark Lindquist, is the mastermind behind the cases against the thirty-six. The prosecuting attorney told that jury that even though Steven is seen on a surveillance camera flirting with women, drinking alcohol, and talking with his friends, every move he made and every word he said was all part of a plan to murder a man that night. But the defense lawyer told the jury something different. He told them that people are friends, plain and simple. "You can't argue everyone is in a conspiracy because they're friends," he said. People know each other, and friendship is not a conspiracy.

Conspiracy exists in places like the TPD Headquarters and the County-City Building.

This is how the trial began. The first witness was called, the man who was shot that night at McCabe's. He had since recov-ered

from his wounds and was now be-ing asked by the prosecution to relate his gang history to the jury. He told them was a member of the Young Gangster Crips and had been since he was twelve. After this, he was asked if he had ever seen Steven Lovelace with a gun. The man re-plied that he had, once, but not the night he was shot. The defense lawyer argued to the judge that this was irrelevant information for the jury, but the judge allowed it, smiling an arrogant smile as he over-ruled the objection. The trial continued.

Detective Ringer sat in court some days of the trial, constantly looking over his shoulder, looking more and more like a paranoid old man. A long time had passed since September of 2009. During that September, he had his goons arrest Curtis Hudson. They raided his house, threw him in a cruiser, and then took him down to the Headquarters where they showed him video footage that incriminated him in various crimes. And then they offered him a deal. In exchange for incriminating all of his friends, he would receive a lighter sentence. They released him into the city and waited until they worked out the logistics of what they were going to do to the Hilltop. He was picked up later in January of 2010 and formalized his plea agreement with Detective Ringer and prosecuting attorney Greg Greer. The conspiracy had been finalized.

A month later, the police rounded up the thirty-six young men. The cases against Steven Lovelace and Michael White were entirely built on the words Curtis Hudson spoke against his friends. Now that the trial had begun, Detective Ringer was finally watching his conspiracy come to fruition. This sick, vindictive man wanted to be present for the destruction of everyone he had targeted. And here he was, anxious, paranoid, and cracked.

When he was called in as a witness, Hudson told the jury he was part of the Young Boxers, a clique of the Hilltop Crips. He

joined the Crips when he was 13 and had known Steven Lovelace his whole life. He said there was no one physically making him remain a Crip, but that it wasn't easy "to leave the Hilltop Crips if you've grown up [in the Hilltop] your whole life." He told the jury that he is familiar with the code on never snitching and that he knows full well that he is hated for what he has done. He betrayed people he has known his whole life just to get a lighter sentence. Hudson also admitted that he had no personal knowledge of anyone committing any crime.

When the prosecuting attorney asked Hudson questions about the Hilltop Crips, he always asked questions regarding policy. To him, a man himself enmeshed in a bloated bureaucracy, everything in the gang must be about policy, rules, and laws. Hudson admitted that it could be considered "policy" to join your friend in a fight if he was getting beat up. But when the defense questioned Hudson, he told the jury that there is no formal rule regarding defending your friends in a fight. Most friends have each others backs. There is no policy behind it. The prosecution then asked if members of the Hilltop Crips were required to retaliate against people who had offended or threatened their friends. Hudson said that they were not. There is no policy requiring Crips to kill someone their friend does not like, nor would he ever have done that himself. The defense asked Hudson to reiterate this for the jury, spelling out that being part of gang was about personal choice, friendship, and camaraderie. While in court, the prosecuting attorney kept looking at Detective Ringer like a little dog, hoping not to displease his master. Whenever the defense attorney spoke, Ringer looked displeased.

The prosecution's case revolved around the issues of policy, rules, and law. To them, the Hilltop Crips are similar to the police and act according to guidelines and policies. In reality, the Hilltop Crips are diverse, chaotic, and irregular. There is a difference be-

tween policy and friendship, a difference that the prosecution cannot admit if they hope to convict this young man. The police and the Prosecutor's Office function like a machine, and thus they imagine that everyone else does, too. Power cannot tolerate a counter-power. Power becomes paranoid when there are free people acting outside of their laws, their rules, and their policies. For all of their mistakes, foolishness, and anger, the Hilltop Crips at least did what they wanted in defiance of the powers that rule Tacoma.

In the midst of Curtis Hudson's examination by the prosecutor, the defense raised an objection regarding the discovery laws, saying that the prosecution had not given them information regarding an earlier interview they had conducted with Hudson. The judge listened to the defense, thought for a few moments, smiled his arrogant smile, and then declared a mistrial. The jury went home, Detective Ringer was furious, and Steven was taken back to his cage. Now he has to wait until February 14 for a new jury to be selected and the trial to start again. Freedom is a long way off for him.

Steven Lovelace merely went to a bar one night, and on that night someone was shot. There is no direct evidence against him. The bulk of the case is built on the words of Curtis Hudson, a friend who provided the police with a map of who was friends with who. Using this map, the police have destroyed a group of free people who they could not keep down. Steven Lovelace is the last of the thirty-six who is still technically innocent. The rest of the cases have come and gone. Over thirty young men are now absent from their communities, locked up and forgotten by the majority of people in Tacoma. Steven is still downtown, in the Pierce County Jail, and he is still fighting for his freedom. He is locked up with hundreds of other people. All of them have gone through a process as illogical, vengeful, and inhuman as the one Steven is still going through.

At the time of printing, Steven Lovelace has been sentenced to seven years in prison. When asked to say any final words, Steven defiantly told the judge that he only took the deal to end the lengthy court hearings and spare his family the grief. The angry judge then gave Steven the maximum sentence.

The demise of the Hilltop Boys is now nearly forgotten. If this ever happens again, if a group of friends is ever targeted by the authorities and labeled a conspiracy, what will you do? It is up to us all to protect each other. There are thirteen-hundred bed spaces in the Pierce County Jail and they want all of those beds filled. Our fight is with the jailers, not our own neighbors.

LOVE TO THE HILLTOP BOYS, A CURSE TO THE SNITCHES, AND HATRED TO THE POLICE

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an invitation to revolt...
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“Why were some of these guys doing what they were doing?” I ask Chastity.

“Some of them...some of them were paying their momma’s mortgage, feeding their kids.”

“Is there any way to stop what the city and the police are doing to the Hilltop?” I ask.

Chastity hesitates for a moment, unsure of what to say.

